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THE SOCIAL ORIGIN OF THEOLOGY

SHAILER MATHEWS

University of Chicago

Theological reconstruction is commonly said to wait upon philosophy. While there is much truth in such a belief, a study of creative periods in theology will show that its fundamental doctrines and systems are only incidentally the outcome of philosophy. Theology deals primarily with experience and experience is far more extensive than rational processes. Theology arises when men undertake to organize their religious experience, beliefs, and customs in harmony with other elements of experience. The organizing principle is all but invariably dramatic, a presupposition born of social experience which the community producing the theology has unconsciously accepted as a basis of social activity and the standard of social values. Most frequently such an organizing principle is that already operative in the state. A second, or apologetic, period begins when men undertake to defend their right to hold religious belief by means of appropriating current elements of culture. The creative and the apologetic stages of theology are indispensable, but the former is primarily social, the latter philosophical. It is the purpose of this paper to establish the former as preliminary to an examination of the principles of theological reconstruction.

I. MYTHOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY, AND THEOLOGY

Religion is personal, but it is also a phase of social experience. Although by no means to be identified with social custom, its

development involves such custom and particularly the preservation of tribal sanctions for various social activities. Yet to limit religion to merely social experience and to make God a symbol of an authoritative totality of social experience is to neglect outstanding elements of personality and its relations. Religion is a word of experience, but it has a correlate in an extra-experiential Reality which is a dominating factor in the situation out of which religion develops. To eliminate an objective God from religion is as illogical as to eliminate the soil and air from the life of a plant. A theology in the nature of the case must therefore contain its meta-experiential elements. A pragmatic view of the world is highly fruitful for the discussion of the psychological and social aspects of religion, but it is not sufficient for a theology which shall include the cosmic processes in which men find themselves.

But after this has been admitted it still remains true that the first creative attempts to rationalize religious experience into harmony with elements of culture have not found their organizing principles in metaphysical processes. Metaphysical treatment of religion has always been a second or even third stage in the rationalizing process. Prior to it are the mythology and theology, each structurally dramatic.

1. Recent discussions in the history of religion have made evident the fact that mythology has played no inconsiderable part in the early stages of religious development. Myths might be described as a method of combining rationalized religious aspiration with observed cosmic phenomena by the use of elementary experience, generally of individuals rather than of groups. In this, mythology differs from theology which organizes religious thought on more genuinely social concepts than combats, love-making, and individual careers. In the case of practically all religions with the exception of the Christian and other religions which like Mohammedanism have been derived from the Bible, the philosophical stage followed immediately upon the mythological and served to destroy confidence in the myth, even when, as in Greece, mythology continued as a form of popular religion long after Plato and Aristotle had all but universalized the philosophical attitude of mind.

In the case of the Hebrew religion, whatever may have been its roots in early Semitic thought, it is all but impossible to discover any period of myth within its biblical stage. Both in it and in Christianity religious syncretism, it is true, did to some extent show itself, as in the influence of Baal-worship upon the Hebrews, and in the appropriation of pagan customs and institutions on the part of the Christians. But Hebraism in its constructive principle was germinally monotheistic. It never was characterized by the mass of mythological details which most polytheistic religions have included. As will appear later, Hebraism used for its structural religious ideas not the adventures of individuals, as in the case of classical mythology, but the universalizing conception of monarchy. Zeus was never a law-giver, but Yahweh's relations with his people were always those existing between a king and his subjects. That is to say, while like mythology in being dramatic rather than philosophical, the material of Hebrew religious thought was organized about an essentially political experience.

2. A distinction between theology and philosophy is hard to draw in terms of definition, for both alike seek to give some sort of unity to the highest thought of mankind. Furthermore, philosophy like theology is largely conditioned by social experience. Of the two, philosophy is by far the more frequent framework for religious thought. Indeed one might even say that there never has been but one well-rounded theology, namely, that which has been produced by the Christian thought of western Europe. The other great religions which have used biblical material have resembled western orthodoxy to some extent, but in the case of Mohammedanism and Judaism no theological system has been developed in any way comparable with that even of the arrested theology of the Eastern church. Yet practically all religions have had their philosophies and in some cases, notably in Hinduism and the religion of Egypt, there has been developed an esoteric system of teaching for the cultured classes often alongside of gross superstitions among the masses. Western Christianity has, it is true, developed its secondary form in the practices of the Roman church, but this secondary Christianity has always become at length organically embodied in a real theology, the subject-matter of which is the

relationship of God and humanity, and which is only apologetically cosmological or metaphysical.

Further, while it is difficult to distinguish formally between theology and philosophy, the content and tendency of the two show marked differences. Philosophy as it has existed in the western world has been concerned primarily with the construction of some world-view which finds its unity in a general conception such as the Ideas of Plato and the Idea of Hegel. Once having gained such an a-priori principle, instead of working toward experience, it has by a process of abstraction worked away from experience. In the place of personal relations, it substitutes those of logic. Pragmatism, it is true, is an exception to this general tendency, but pragmatism itself is more concerned with the problems of reality and knowledge than with the systematic presentation of the relations of man and God as theology conceives them. And there is a further distinction between pragmatism and theology in that theology cannot be content to find its subject-matter wholly in the region of experience. Theology, since its subject-matter is primarily religion, must always involve a metaphysical reality and relations which condition experience.

A comparison of philosophies with theology will show still another difference. Whereas the organizing, unifying principles of philosophy are, with the exception of pragmatism, in the realm of the meta-experiential, in the case of theology the unifying principle is some presupposition which determines social experience as a whole. In giving form and rational acceptability to its formulations, the theology of the schools has utilized dominant philosophies, but this process belongs to the second rather than to the original and creative stratum of the organizing process. A theological *system* as distinguished from its amplification has sprung from the same subconscious social mind as that from which has sprung political theory. Interplay between politics and theology is always to be noted, but neither is strictly the origin of the other. The parallelism between the two is due to their common origin. It is this fact that in part explains the survival in highly developed types of theology of those concepts which are fully intelligible only when they are historically valued as drawn from the experience of differ-

ent economic and political stages through which the people creating the theology have passed in its development.¹

Such a fact is easily appreciated. Theology is essentially concerned with *relations* or *situations* in which man and God are both involved. But to describe relations men inevitably make use of relations already in experience. In religion men seek help;² they justify that search by the use of those categories of social experience in which help has already been found and its methods of operation organized.

Such control exercised by the non-religious presuppositions of social experience over a theological system, whether it be simple or highly developed, is inevitable, since such a system is only one phase of a social mind. A philosophical treatment of religion and particularly a philosophy of religion are always apt to overlook this fact because of their tendency to deal with concepts abstracted from experience. But speaking strictly, there is no history of doctrine; there is only the history of men who hold doctrines. A "doctrinal man" is as impossible as an "economic man." Theology has been even slower than political economy to recognize this fact, but as soon as the doctrine-making process is seen to be only one phase of an evolving civilization, its social aspect at once appears clear and the approach to theology is seen to be through history and sociology rather than through philosophy. Indeed, it may be said that when philosophy becomes dominant in theology the period of creative theology like the period of creative mythology has closed.

II. THE ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY THE SAME AS THAT OF CONTEMPORARY POLITICS

1. The creative periods of theology have been those in which *subconscious* social presuppositions are becoming organizing

¹ See the interesting but not always accurate discussion of Patten, *The Social Basis of Religion*. See also King, *The Development of Religion*, chaps. ix, x; Ames, *The Psychology of Religious Experience*, pp. 113 f. Andrew Lang, *The Making of Religion*, furnishes a corrective to some of the generalizations of those who minimize the metaphysical element of even primitive religions. It should never be forgotten that theology is only one phase of a religion, important as it is in determining the course of religious development.

² Cf. my article, "The Evolution of Religion," in *American Journal of Theology*, January, 1911.

principles of religious thought and experience as well as of political forms. For example, in Hebraic theology the periods of theological development were those also of political development. Yahweh-worship developed theologically always *pari passu* with the development of the Hebrew state. In the earlier stages Yahweh appears, not as a true monarch, but as the head of a clan. As Hebraic civilization developed he became the head of a tribal confederacy. As an incipient nationalism developed and particularly as the Hebrew people came under the influence of the more highly developed monarchies of Babylonia and Assyria he became a monarch and his relations with the world were similar to those of the ancient oriental conqueror with his subjects and enemies.¹

It would be a mistake to think that there was any deliberately reflective use of new political ideals in the systematizing of religion. While it is true that the religious teachers of the Hebrews never undertook to organize a scientifically complete system of religious instruction, their religious thinking was none the less within a theological schema. And this schema was essentially the same as was being developed in the region of politics. Theology and the ideals of the Hebrew state alike sprang from the experience of the people. The experience of one was the principles of the other because both alike expressed the developing dynamic social presuppositions. Jehovah dealt with his people as a monarch. He gave his law to Moses as Shamash gave his law to Hammurabi. The Day of Yahweh, which at the start was hardly more than a day of battle, became a day of judgment, in which Yahweh was the supreme judge of Hebrew and Gentile alike. As the monarch was bound by nothing except his own will to which he must ever be true, so Yahweh made promises the keeping of which was conditioned only upon the loyalty of his people. It was this transcendentalized politics which shaped Hebraic religious thinking and passed on to the later Christian theology. So far as philosophy emerged, as in the case of Philo, it was a means of adjusting the fundamental theological concept to the culture of the Greek world. And no matter how much Philo might speculate regarding the

¹ For a detailed study of that struggle between civilizations which shaped Hebrew religious thought, see Wallis, *Sociological Study of the Bible*.

Logos or with what freedom he allegorized the history of his people, he never changed those underlying political concepts which constituted the schema of his national religion. Sovereignty and subjects, law and judgment, punishment and rehabilitation, these great rubrics which express the presuppositions controlling the highest social activity of the Hebrews, became the skeleton of their religious thought.

2. Christianity considered theologically perpetuates this transcendental politics of the Hebrew. It springs genetically, however, not directly from the Hebraism of the Old Testament, but from the Judaism of New Testament times. Its principles are those of Hebraism re-expressed in the messianic hope.

How far Christianity at its start was from being a philosophy appears not only from the teaching of Jesus but also from the expressed hostility of Paul to what he called "the wisdom of this world," a hostility which was vigorously urged by such church fathers as Tertullian. The latter's treatise *The Prescription of Heretics* is a plea for the supremacy of a dramatic theology as over against a philosophy. But neither Paul nor Tertullian was apart from other Christian writers. The theology to which they held was the limit within which philosophically minded Christians like Justin and Origen debated. This theology epitomized in *regula fidei* was nothing more nor less than a transcendentalized theory of that conception of government which was an unconscious but determinative presupposition of the entire social life of the ancient world. And its schema was the messianism which had been brought over from Judaism.

Messianism undoubtedly had deep roots which must be traced back into the hopes and mythologies of ancient nations, particularly those of Babylonia and Persia, whose civilizations had affected Judaism. But there is no chief root that does not finally end in social practice. However great or, as it seems to me more probable, however slight may have been the rôle of the Gilgamesh epic in Jewish messianism, it is colored by the political habits of the age in which it arose. Similarly in the case of the influence of the Persian religion. Whatever may have been the relative importance of the reciprocal influence of Mazdaism and Hebraism, the outcome

in either case was a religious hope that involved transcendental politics.

The Jewish messianic hope passed through two stages both formally political. In the first the Jews believed that Yahweh would re-establish through ordinary methods the Jewish state as supreme over all its enemies; and in the second they hoped that the same triumphant nation would be established, not in the ordinary course of history, but by the miraculous intervention of God through his Anointed. Messianism is as truly political in its transcendental as in its politico-revolutionary stage. A sovereign God who seeks to establish his kingdom by the conquest of the rival kingdom of Satan; a vice-gerent through whom the divine sovereign works and who is to conquer the hostile kingdom and establish the kingdom of God in which the law of God is to be established; a new age in which God is to be the supreme sovereign and his people supremely blessed while the arch-antagonist is bound and punished with his followers; a day of judgment in which the triumphant king metes out the fate of all mankind in accordance with its loyalty or disloyalty: these are the fundamental elements of the program of messianism. The resurrection simply assured the disposition of all mankind in the final world-order. It requires no argument to show that this schema is fundamental to Christian theology, and that it is indeed the organizing principle of theology as it subsequently was developed in the western world and less imperfectly in the Greek church. Whatever else philosophy may have accomplished in the development of doctrine, it has never obscured these fundamental rubrics which were carried over into religion from the social presuppositions on which the ancient civilization was ultimately based. Indeed Christian theology as an organized system might be described as a political dramatic scenario in which the future and present relations of men and God are set forth in terms drawn from the political experience of the Jewish people.¹

3. At two points this schema is modified in the New Testament and by later writers by the addition of non-political elements which

¹ A striking use of the strict political concept to prove polytheism is quoted by Harnack, *Expansion of Christianity*, I, 37 n., from *Macarius Magnes*, iv. 20. A god, Porphyry insists, if he is to be a monarch must rule over subjects of his own genus.

are really the most essential in Christianity. There is first the spiritual experience of the Christian. This is in turn twofold. Those phenomena which are called in the New Testament the gifts of the Holy Ghost have never been thoroughly worked into orthodoxy and have always been emphasized among groups (e.g., the Montanists) who have been to a considerable degree regarded as heretical. The reason is very plain. The general schema of historical orthodoxy is transcendental politics redefined by the use of other elements of social experience and rationalized in detail by current philosophy. In such a schema there is no room for mysticism. That must always be extra-orthodox.

Yet the second sort of spiritual experience, the actual transformation of the believer by God, has always been emphasized by theology. In Greek Christianity this element played a very large rôle. We see it in the "recapitulation" by Jesus, so attractive to Irenaeus, and even more in the conception of salvation as the theizing of human nature into incorruption. At one time it even bade fair to become the organizing principle for an entire system. But the development of Greek theology was arrested in its christological epoch, and western theology became so far committed to a forensic outline of teaching, that the saving transformation of the believer was attached to the idea of the church and its sacraments instead of being allowed to organize Christian teaching into a vital system. Yet it has always persisted in western theology as a sort of parallel orthodoxy. If it instead of the messianic drama had become really central in orthodoxy, doctrinal development would have been far more vital and less authoritative. In modern theology this spiritual and vital element is assuming a new importance and constitutes one of the great constructive principles for a theology which shall be more in accord with the presuppositions of modern social life so radically different from those expressed in absolute monarchy. Completely outside of the inherited messianic drama, it is essential Christianity itself.

A second element, too little used by orthodoxy because it also lies outside of the politico-religious drama of messianism, is the experience of Jesus himself. All theologians, it is true, have generalized this element of historical Christianity in the same

proportion as they have not been dominated by the transcendental politics of messianism but the really personal life and significance of Jesus have lain outside of the norm of doctrinal development. Indeed, Christology has never been whole-heartedly interested in Jesus, even though it has devoted itself to his natures and person. The reason is simple: in the messianic schema the Christ is essentially functional. He must perform the work of God's vice-gerent. For such an office his earthly life was of small significance. Even his resurrection, which, if once accepted as historical, has a meaning wholly independent of the messianic argument, has been made contributory to the proof of his divine office. The chief interest in the anti-Arian movement out of which orthodoxy rose lay in the desire for assurance that the Savior was divine. The ethical implications in the belief were all but overlooked.

Yet in the actual experiences of the historical Jesus with their wealth of religious and moral appeal, there was overlooked another organizing principle which modern theology recognizes, but to which historical orthodoxy was blind because such experiences were not readily systematized in the messianic-drama theology.

The reason that the messianic drama became the vertebral column, so to speak, of Christian doctrine is not far to seek. It is primitive Christianity itself, minus only these experimental elements. The New Testament and other early Christian literature make it plain that the conquest of Christianity was due primarily to an enthusiasm born of the belief that the entire messianic program was to be immediately fulfilled and that those who accepted Jesus in his messianic capacity would participate in the joys of the literal kingdom which he was to establish. The beliefs with which Christianity started on its conquest of the Roman Empire were utterly foreign to philosophy and were as dramatic as the social experience in which the early Christians shared. Recall only the impassioned hopes and arguments of Ignatius. To think of Christianity as originally an ethical, sociological, or philosophical movement is to misinterpret it completely. The elements of its hope were concrete and their unity was the unity of a drama. Therein was Christian theology in outline.¹

¹ Cf. Augustine's treatise on *The Faith and the Creed*. This fact emerged wherever orthodoxy came into sharp contrast with philosophy. Thus Origen *Ag. Celsus* i. 7: "Who is ignorant of the statement that Jesus was born of a virgin, and that he was

4. The philosophizing of theologians never destroyed these fundamental elements. By the middle of the second century, however, this messianic expectation had ceased to be concrete and had become transcendental. True, there were those like the Montanists who fought against this transformation and sought to maintain the messianic drama-theology in full literalism. But so strong had become the tendency to revalue the messianic program as a philosophy that this more primitive type of Christianity was repeatedly relegated to the limbo of heresy. Notwithstanding the contributions made by Tertullian to Christian doctrine and vocabulary, the line of theological development runs not through him, but through that remarkable group of Alexandrians who made *regula fidei* the basis of a new philosophy by synthesizing the messianic drama with Hellenistic culture.¹

This transition can be observed primarily in two particulars. (1) With the disappearance of the hope that the heavenly kingdom would be immediately established, the Christian teachers passed from the heralding to the rationalizing of their message of deliverance. At once they became involved in disputes with representatives of contemporary philosophies, all of them profoundly interested in cosmological speculations.

We have so little first-hand knowledge of men like Marcion that it is unsafe to speculate as to what Christianity might have become had the church leaders not stood manfully by the messianic outline, but it can hardly be doubted that the new religion would have been lost in the swarming gnostic sects. The line of defense as laid down by Tertullian was simplicity itself. "Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition! We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ Jesus, no inquisition after enjoying the gospel! With our faith, we desire no further belief. For this is our palmary

crucified and that his resurrection is an article of faith among many, that a general judgment is announced to come, in which the wicked are to be punished according to their deserts, and the righteous to be duly rewarded."

¹ In a way the beginning of this recasting of the gospel may be seen in the later Pauline literature, in which the apologetic against heresy led to the ascription to Jesus of a cosmic significance which included whatever truth may have been conceded to the views opposed.

faith, that there is nothing which we ought to believe besides."¹ Tertullian's final appeal is to *regula fidei*, which is the very quintessence of an unphilosophical, dramatic summary of Christian messianism.

(2) But the Alexandrine teachers chose quite another method. With them *regula fidei* was final, but it was also defensible philosophically. Accordingly, for centuries the defense proceeded in the way of giving the Messiah a cosmological value. Materials for such redefinition lay close at hand in the New Testament terms, Son of God and Logos.

In the New Testament usage, the term Son of God was simply a synonym for Messiah and the Pauline usage by no means served to modify the politico-dramatic expectation of messianism. In the hands of the Alexandrine theologians, however, it passed from the social presuppositions of politics to the even more universal presupposition of generation. A study of Justin Martyr and Origen will enable one to trace this clearly. Instead of the conquering king we have the incarnate God foretold by the prophets; and this doctrine of incarnation which played practically no rôle whatever in Paulinism becomes a central feature of the new interpretation of *regula fidei*. But the transition from the political to the parental-filial presupposition may be seen even before Justin in the struggles of Docetism to reach a rational Christology. Indeed, the dangers inherent in this heresy appear in the Johannine epistles, where a test of genuine Christian belief is to be seen in the assertion that the Christ has come in the flesh. The question under discussion did not concern the Godhead but the historical person Jesus. How could the Son of God be genuinely human? The source of the difficulty in accepting the Hebraic conception of unction is doubtless to be found in the fact that Christianity had passed from the Jewish people where messianism in its full content was a religious presupposition, to the gentile world in which the possibility of incarnation through divine generation was a universally accepted presupposition. But even here it will be observed that the transition is from one social presupposition to another—from politics to paternity.

¹ *Presc. Haer.* vii.

A more genuinely philosophical concept appears in the Logos. The most significant transition in the history of Christology occurred when the Logos of cosmological significance was identified with the begotten Son of God, and the new conception was injected into the old messianic formula of *regula fidei*. The Logos then with Justin became the revealer of a new and sacred philosophy.

This tendency to elevate concrete dramatic expectation into a transcendental, philosophical formula reached its culmination when the contest over the sonship of the Logos passed from the realm of history into the realm of the metaphysics of the God-head and the center of interest in the Son became not Jesus but the second person of a trinity. Just as the kingdom of God ceased to become a definite social order upon the earth and became a transcendental heaven, did the doctrine of divine sonship pass from the stage of history into the stage of metaphysics. But again the mold in which the new doctrine was shaped was not in itself metaphysical but one of social experience. The great discussion of the century that culminated in the Council of Nicea centered about two terms, "eternal generation" and *persona*. We are accustomed to overlook this fact because so much attention came to be centered upon the metaphysical term "consubstantial"; but consubstantiability was only a marker for the genuine content expressed by the sonship of the Logos through eternal generation rather than creation. And as any fair study of Athanasius will show, it is the expression "begotten, not made" which is the real heart of the Nicene Creed. Consubstantiability was simply a dangerous metaphysical concept blurred by Latin philistinism, used as a shibboleth against Arianism to protect the content of "eternal generation." The organon, so to speak, by which "eternal generation" was rationalized was the legal term suggested by the lawyer Tertullian, *persona*. While it is true that in the entire trinitarian controversy the tendency was toward abstraction, it is beyond question that the final decision of the Nicene Council was regarded not as a completely metaphysical, but rather as a dramatic and symbolic expression. The opposition which Athanasius felt to the word "consubstantial" was largely due to his fear lest the word should involve Christian theology in meta-

physical heresies. What he and his party desired was the maintenance of the actual relationship which the figure "eternal generation" expressed. The appropriation of *persona*, a term so essential to Roman law, was due to the fact that it connoted something that gave the theological truth a universalized social, i.e., forensic connotation. However metaphysical the language of the disputants in the Arian controversy, the synthetic rather than the definitive force of the term appears from the well-known expression of Augustine to the effect that the word is *persona* used to express a fact which really transcends formal definition.¹

But while thus the messianic term Christ lost much of its original content and became metaphysical, the entire schema of the Christian hope remained unchanged. The philosophizing of ecumenical Christianity never affected the dramatic program contained in the old Roman symbol and even its metaphysical Trinitarianism was itself determined by the analogies of social experience. The ecumenical creeds never passed beyond the relation of the Son to the Father except as regards the person of Jesus and, somewhat incidentally, in the matter of the procession of the Holy Ghost, and never attempted to reorganize the messianic program as a whole.

III. LATIN ORTHODOXY AS DETERMINED BY SOCIAL EXPERIENCE

When one passes from ecumenical to Latin theology the dominance of the original messianic program is at once apparent. Whereas the Greeks with their constitutional inability to organize politically turned to the concept of salvation as a gaining of immortality, the Latin world with its passion for administration and law undertook to develop the governmental presuppositions which lay back of the primitive Christian hope. Indeed the history of doctrinal development in the western world might be described as the construction of a theology on the basis of transcendental politics. Theology thus advanced parallel with the development of the church as an institution. As the Christian community ceased to be simply the group of those who were the expectant citizens of the kingdom which was to be established and became a

¹ *On the Trinity*, v. 9.

religious empire constructed in accordance with the precedents of the Roman Empire, so Christian theology became the theory of a transcendental state whose sovereign was God.¹

The course of this transformation involved the gradual formulation of Christian doctrines whose organizing principles were the dominant presuppositions on which society at different times itself was organized.

1. So far as the doctrine of God was concerned, the organizing principle was confessedly that of monarchy.

(1) The Christian God was first of all the universal creator.² The struggle with Gnosticism had settled this beyond a peradventure, but the doctrine of God as related to humanity reflects the development of the social mind from which also sprang political theory. With Augustine the absolute sovereignty of God became the central element of the theology because of his struggle with Pelagianism, but the real distinction between the Pelagian and the Augustinian was not in the struggle between foreordination and the free will. It is rather to be seen in Augustine's *City of God* in which the entire Christian dispensation is definitely cast in the political mold. This unmodified absolute monarchy of God was the starting-point of all theological discussions throughout the Roman Catholic church and thence passed over into the Protestant Augustinianism of Luther and Calvin.

(2) The first modifications of this monarchical presupposition are to be found, not in Pelagianism, which rested fundamentally on philosophical and ethical bases, but in the political revolutions which caused the break-up of the Holy Roman Empire and the rise of constitutional government. A difficulty is here, of course, apparent. Constitutional monarchy makes a very ineffective medium for the exposition of the supremacy of God, for religion instinctively refuses to worship a God who is in any sense limited in the exercise of his power by the will of his subjects. Yet in Deism

¹The beginning of this process may be seen in the Apologists' insistence that the Christians were a "third race," the Gentiles and Jews being the other two.

²Yet even here God was spoken of as giving laws for the administration of the universe. Cf. Origen *Ag. Celsus* i. 18. Believers were his subjects, Origen *De Principiis* i. 6. For the development of this twofold position in scholasticism see in general, Taylor, *Mediaeval Mind*, II, 275 f.

the divine government is in a way constitutionalized. It is a striking fact that Deism arose in England practically at the same time that the English people, after revolting against the absolute sovereignty of the Stuarts and the constitutional anomaly of Cromwell, drew up the Bill of Rights and developed the politics of the seventeenth century. Deism sprang from the same social mind that gave rise to the political theories of Locke. Just as an English monarch was stripped of his absolute sovereignty and removed from the control of the state which was thereafter to be self-directing in terms of its own law, did Deism undertake to remove God from immediate control of the universe and permit the universe to take over its own self-direction. This is not to say that Deism was necessarily the product of the new political theory, but rather to say that both alike expressed the same developing presupposition dominating the social mind. The fact that Deism did not have anything more than a derived influence on the continent of Europe is doubtless due to the fact that in contemporary France absolute monarchy still remained the dominant social presupposition while in other continental countries the political development had hardly begun.

(3) A still further development of the idea of God is to be seen at the end of the period of revolution. If there is anything characteristic of the latter half of the eighteenth century it is the rise of the people against the hereditary and autocratic privilege of the monarchy and nobility. This spirit of revolution may be traced in all the French writers who carried on to further completeness the social-political theories of England. The Encyclopedists, Voltaire and Rousseau, are outstanding illustrations of the new social mind which believed in the rights of the people as over against the governing classes. But this development of belief in natural rights within the region of politics is no more pronounced than the contemporaneous development of the doctrine of the natural rights of humanity as over against a sovereign God. Deism was an untenable position religiously, but revolution in behalf of oppressed individuals found a natural expression in theology on the one side in the Methodist movement, and on the other in the rise of Unitarianism.

The former of these two noteworthy movements was not really theological except as it favored Arminianism of an unpolemical type. The situation was far different in the case of the second. The Unitarian movement was not fundamentally christological although it was drawn into christological discussion. It was something more radical. It was the religious correlate of the rise of popular sovereignty. As the masses of America, France, the Lowlands, and even Prussia undertook to demonstrate their rights as men over against an autocracy of privilege, so did the Unitarians undertake to set forth the rights of a proletarian humanity as over against the sovereign God. Though, because of a variety of causes, it never became a widespread religious movement, none the less its influence has been felt wherever the presupposition of social activity is individualistic and democratic. And with the spread of democracy as the presupposition of social activity, the need of recasting the doctrine of God has become increasingly apparent.¹

An illustration of this fact is to be seen in the development of the federal theology. This theology not only involves the theory of contracts which became such a favorite and dominating conception of early modern political theory, but also the newer political

¹ In this connection it is pertinent to recall that in the development of Roman Catholicism there was a reproduction of the general juridical aspects of the Empire. Roman law reappears in Canon law, not merely in the sense that the details of Canon law are so frequently the readjustments of the imperial formulas but also in what might be called its basal philosophy. Christianity in fact gradually became a new sort of legal system, not only in the sense that it developed an ethical legalism, but also in that its entire theological system reproduced legal ideals. Thus Origen says: "We admit that we teach those men to believe without reasons who are unable to abandon all other employments, and give themselves to an examination of arguments" (*Ag. Celsus* i. 10); "The union of Christians does not rest on reason or on a reason but on divine *energeia* shown in prophets who foretold Christ" (*Ag. Celsus* iii. 14). (Cf. also *Ag. Celsus* i. 2.) But the authoritative concept was more distinct than this. The Christians come to be regarded as a third nation as over against the Jews and the Gentiles. (Origen *Ag. Celsus* iii. 8 may be regarded as a typical usage.) As this point of view developed in the Middle Ages there emerged the conception of the Bible as the *jus gentium* of theology. (Taylor, *Mediaeval Mind*, II, 268.) In this way the Scriptures became a fundamental basis of all theology occupying the same relationship to the Canon law and the various ecclesiastical statutes that the *jus gentium* or *lex naturalis* occupied to the systems of imperial codes. (Gierke, *Mediaeval Political Theories*, p. 172, describes *lex naturalis* as a truly promulgated law.) It of course goes without saying that the Canon law gave new meaning to the terms of Roman law in the interests of theological system.

theories of representation. It is only what we should expect when we see this doctrine developing in those nations where representative government was similarly developing. The federal headship of Adam is not to be found in the theologies of countries where the monarchical and feudal conceptions remained in force. Cocceius, who may fairly be said to have introduced the representative principle into the theology, was thus utilizing a principle which was developing in the Calvinistic states in which alone representative government triumphed. The fact that it was proposed but vehemently rejected in the Council of Trent is a commentary on the difference in social presuppositions of theology historically understood. The Roman Catholic church has always clung to the absolute monarchical conception as a presupposition of its theology and administration. Thus again politics and theologies seem to spring from identical social minds.

2. Any discussion of a systematized doctrine of sin properly starts with Augustine. The Greek Fathers were not concerned with the guilt in sin, but rather with the corruption in the human nature which was to be overcome by the giving of immortality. In the case of Augustine we find this idea of corruption very definitely identified with concupiscence. But he is not content to leave sin in what might be called its quasi-biological definition. He carried it over and emphasized the element of forensic guilt which was in addition to such corruption. It is to be noticed that neither of these conceptions is strictly philosophical. In fact the motive and the chief effort of his discussion is the taking of sin out from the philosophical region into which the Pelagians would carry it, just as truly as out from the cosmological field into which the Manicheans placed it. That he was affected by the latter is of course obvious, but his systematic treatment of sin is steadily in terms of forensic conception.

Such a conception became dominant in Augustinian theology of a later date, a fact by no means surprising when it is recalled that so many of the creative theologians, among them Calvin, were trained as lawyers. In fact the whole conception of guilt as over against the corruption of nature is evidently forensic and characteristically western. Nor did this conception presuppose

general juridical habits alone. It is at least a fair question whether the conception of the corruption of nature so disagreeably argued by Augustine and so subtly elaborated by his successors would have been intelligible to a civilization unaccustomed to such a political conception as the taint of blood in the case of traitors and the more primitive but persistent legal conception that the individual shared in the guilt of his tribe or family. Doubtless one of the reasons which led to the modification of the doctrine of original sin lay in the rise of new political practices.

3. When we pass to the doctrine of justification we enter an admittedly forensic field. Attempts, it is true, have been made of late years to show that *δικαίω* means "to make righteous," but such a view is exegetically impossible. Justification means nothing more or less than acquittal. God as the king either directly or through his Messiah remits the penalty (as distinct from the consequences) of sin which was due to the sinner. It is this point of view that the Protestant theologies sharply emphasized although it lies beneath the teaching of the Roman Catholic church. Justification as a forensic act is not one of experience and as the argument of Paul in Galatians plainly shows was a status which could not be complete until the final judgment. In the meantime those who had faith could rest assured of the certainty of acquittal before the bar of Christ because of their experience of the Spirit. Protestantism in its sharp distinction between justification and sanctification has served to make the forensic quality of the term increasingly distinct. That it is thus an extension of social experience must appear without further argument.

4. The history of the doctrine of the atonement exhibits more perfectly than that of any other the immediate influence of social experience on itself, doubtless because neither ecumenical nor Latin Christianity has formulated the significance of the death of Christ in any fashion comparable with trinitarian and christological orthodoxy.

(1) In the ancient church two social customs influenced the shaping-up of the doctrinal significance of the death of Christ, those of sacrifice and of ransom.

The use of sacrifice as a means of valuing the death of Christ

is evident in the New Testament. The reason for this is simple. The entire religious world was accustomed to feel the act of reconciliation completed only upon the offering of a sacrificial gift. Whatever may have been the origin of sacrifice, in New Testament times it had become thoroughly conventionalized as a custom concerning the utility of which there was no more doubt than of any other universal practice. Pagan and Jew alike sacrificed. In the new Christian religion no sacrifice was offered; and this fact, especially when Christianity passed beyond the limits of the Jewish Temple worship, must have given rise to serious questioning both explicit and implicit. The neglect of a universal custom would force the Christian, with his confidence in his reconciliation with a God who had previously threatened punishment, to query whether such reconciliation could have been accomplished without any sacrifice. The reply which the New Testament writers gave to such a question was very simple. Christ was a sacrifice, but offered not by men but by God.¹ Such a use of the historic death of Christ would have been quite as intelligible to the Gentile as to the Jew. Paul, Peter, and John use mostly the generic concept but sometimes the specific, the Passover. None of the New Testament writers, however, found it necessary to elaborate this view. The mere application of the entire sacrificial concept to the death of Christ could make real to a world actually practicing sacrifice the significance of an already experienced union of God. Like every sacrificial gift, it brought the assurance that reconciliation with God was complete.

What is true of the New Testament writers is true also of those subsequent writers who lived in a period when sacrifice was a common social practice. They never systematized, explained, or expanded it. There was no need. They had simply to use it as an interpretative medium, intelligible and effective in a world accustomed to a sacrifice.² It was only when sacrifice ceased that

¹ Rom. 3:23-25. Cf. I John 2:1-2.

² See, for instance, Ep. Barnabas, chaps. 5, 7, 8, 12. Similarly Ignatius refers to the blood of Christ and of God. But generally in the Apostolic Fathers the sufferings of Christ are used rather as an encouragement to suffer in behalf of the faith. In almost every case his death is mentioned, as in Paul, in close reference to his resurrection.

Reference to cleansing by the blood, e.g., Justin *I Apol.*, chap. 32, and elsewhere,

the sacrificial aspect of the death of Christ was developed through the sacraments into more complete dogmatic significance.

The second social practice by which the significance of the death of Christ is set forth is that of ransom.¹ At the first this figure was used without elaboration in the sense of the cost of the messianic vocation. The death of Christ in behalf of his kingdom is set forth as similar to the sufferings of some king in behalf of his subjects.² But the figure was too suggestive to be left undeveloped. But to whom was the ransom paid? Not to God,³ who had sent his son, but, naturally, to Satan.⁴ This conception so long-lived in patristic thought was simply an appropriation of a custom common throughout all undeveloped civilizations of restoring captives to their friends in return for some payment. As the race, or the saints, as the case might be, were held in captivity by Satan, they were purchased from him by Christ, who through his death entered into the lower regions, surrendering himself to Satan in order that certain persons might be set free and pass into heaven. The escape of Jesus himself from such a surrender naturally attracted the homiletic attention of the later writers and this conception was developed into a thoroughly unethical pronouncement. God was described as having used the humanity of Jesus as a sort of bait

are not infrequent but it is an open question whether such references are not rather akin to the mysteries than to sacrifice in the Jewish sense of the term. Cf. Justin *I Apol.*, chap. 61: "This washing, baptism, is called illumination because they who learned these things are illuminated in their understanding and in the name of Jesus Christ. . . . He who is illuminated is washed." See also *Dial. Trypho*, chap. 13. In this latter work Justin naturally finds the forecast of the sufferings of Christ in the various sacrificial practices of the Hebrews, e.g., chaps. 41, 43, 44, 54. Justin goes somewhat farther than other writers in his view that Christ vicariously bore a curse in behalf of the human family (chaps. 95, 96), but it is not the curse of God but of the Jews.

¹ Matt. 20:28.

² Clement, chap. 55: "Many kings and princes, in times of pestilence, when they had been instructed by an oracle, have given themselves up to death, in order that by their own blood they might deliver their fellow-citizens."

³ See the noble passages in Ep. Diognetus, chap. 7; and Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* vii. 1.

⁴ The first clear expression of this theory is in Origen *Com. Rom.* ii. 13. 4. There is no need in this connection to discuss the interesting view of "recapitulation" set forth by Irenaeus, although in a complete history of the doctrine of the atonement it would deserve careful consideration.

by which Satan was caught on the hook of Christ's divinity.¹ It is not to our purpose to discuss this matter in detail, but simply to call attention to the fact that these two modes of interpreting the death of Christ were carried over from the social practice of the time and involved the presuppositions on which that practice rested. That there were other conceptions of the death of Christ in which the term "satisfaction" was incidentally used is true, but even in such cases it was not a "satisfaction" to God's honor or justice in the sense later given the term. And here again Tertullian, probably the originator of the expression, was utilizing the practices of law.

(2) It was approximately a thousand years before the death of Christ found a real place in the system of Christian thought. At that time it was introduced by Anselm in his famous work *Cur Deus Homo*. Even a cursory reading of that book shows how far the explanation involves the dominant concepts of feudalism. The death of Christ according to Anselm is not punitive but was the means by which humanity and God co-operated in the incarnation to render satisfaction to the "honor" of God which had been violated by the sin of humanity. Whether or not this conception was born of Germanic or Roman or, as seems on the whole probable, was a combination of the two elements, it is of a piece with the practice of the Middle Ages. Only from such a point of view is it intelligible. The student of feudalism, however, finds no difficulty in the general philosophy of the theory. God's relations to the world are those of a feudal lord to his vassals and subjects, and their relation to him is similarly considered as a part of a transcendental feudal system.

(3) The theory of the atonement held by the reformers involves a change parallel to that which occurred in the political history of the day. Strictly feudal ideas have been replaced by the claims of punitive justice. The change that came over the mediaeval mind as it became modern found an early expression in the right of those in authority to exercise vengeance in the name of justice. The death of Christ by the reformers is not conceived of as rendering satisfaction to God's "honor" but it becomes strictly penal.

¹ So, e.g., Gregory the Great and Gregory of Nyssa distinctly specify God's deceit in the transaction.

His punitive suffering makes it possible for the love of God to express itself without giving up the divine necessity of punishment. This fundamental conception varied with different writers, sometimes reaching the extreme form of a commercial substitution of a punishment borne by Christ mathematically equivalent to those sufferings which otherwise would have been borne by those who had committed sin. This commercial conception was particularly natural in an age which was feeling the great expansion of commerce, which developed with the discovery of the western world. The God of the theologians found his analogy in the relentless monarchs of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who could carry on wars of religion in Europe and a conquest of Peru and Mexico on the western continent.

(4) With Grotius this conception of God seemed to be impossible, and that great lawyer did for the doctrine of the atonement what he was at the same time doing for international law. Just as he expressed in the latter the growing conviction that law needed to be set forth in all its sovereignty wholly apart from the peculiar institutions or persons by whom it was enforced, did he express in the doctrine of the atonement the belief that the divine law needed to be vindicated.

(5) Alongside of this development there grew up the doctrine of the atonement which was based upon the religious practice of penance of the secondary Christianity which can be traced from the third century. According to such a view men may acquire merit by undergoing certain discomforts. It was an easy step, therefore, to extend the idea of merit already intimately ingrained in the social practice of the church to the work of Christ. His merit like that of the saints was transferable to his followers either directly through faith as in Protestantism or indirectly through the church as in Roman Catholicism.

(6) Since the days of the Reformation the satisfaction of God's justice or the vindication of his law has been the prevailing mode of interpreting the death of Christ, but as the ethical sense of humanity has developed, they have been felt to be by many insufficient.¹ To such persons the character of God which they

¹ This reaction appears as early as Abelard, but earlier writers approximated his "moral influence" point of view.

implied seemed inferior to the ideals which were demanded of men in their ordinary relations with each other. In consequence of this, among other causes, the theory of the atonement has become that of the social ethics which has been steadily working in the western world. As punishment has been conceived of increasingly as reformatory quite as much as punitive and as our whole penal system has minimized vengeance in the name of justice, so has the doctrine of the atonement passed to that of moral example and the revelation of the love and nature of God.

It is evident from this sketch of the six different types of the atonement that no one of them is, strictly speaking, philosophical, but that each is an extension of some definite presupposition governing social practice. Neither sacrifice, ransom, satisfaction of "honor," satisfaction of justice, vindication of the majesty of law, transfer of acquired merit, nor the vicarious suffering enforced by social solidarity makes the doctrine of the atonement a philosophical matter, and each one has been outgrown and abandoned by those who have come under the control of newer presuppositions which have governed social action.

IV. WHY THEOLOGY HAS NOT DEVELOPED PARALLEL WITH THE PRESUPPOSITIONS OF SOCIAL EXPERIENCE

While thus the influence of the presuppositions of social experience is to be traced in the development of doctrinal systems, it is also true that there has been no such complete parallelism in the development of theology and social institutions as might be expected. Theologies have not always been orthodox, but they have seldom reached wide acceptance when diverging widely. Furthermore, periods of intellectual and political progress have always been marked by distrust as well as transformation of theological systems.

The reason for these discrepancies between the logical and the actual relation of theology to the social mind are not far to seek.

1. In the first place, theology has always been checked in its response to the creative social forces by a tendency to become a philosophy. The history of theology on the one side may be

described as a struggle between these dramatic conceptions in which men have endeavored to make real to themselves the significance of their religious beliefs, and philosophy. Such a conflict was inevitable from the fact already noted that philosophy is both the product of the same social experience as theological thought, and at the same time is a phase of that social mind with which theology has to reckon. In its earlier stages theology was forced into conflict with systems of thought which undertook to organize Christianity in terms of some cosmological or metaphysical principle. Especially was this true in the case of the great contest lasting for centuries between Catholicism and Gnosticism. The gnostic movement, strictly speaking, was not theological. Combining the cosmological idea of emanation and the theosophical idea of dualism, it undertook to embody in itself such elements of the New Testament as it could. Its success was great and there resulted what might fairly be called a rival religion which was Christian only in the sense that it embodied certain elements of Christianity in a synthetic philosophical schema covering all phases of human thought.

In their struggle with this rival the Christian thinkers, as has already been pointed out, strove to do two things: first, to maintain the supremacy of the messianic schema which was involved in the baptismal symbol and *regula fidei*; and second, to show forth the philosophical significance of such doctrines as were in process of formulation. That Catholicism conquered was due to many causes, but doubtless as much as any to the fact that although cosmological significance was given to Christ reconceived as Logos, the second person of the Trinity, the Catholic scheme of doctrine was not subjected to that world-view which was the basis of the gnostic teaching. On one side Catholicism protected itself by the criticism of the extravagant ideas of Gnosticism, and on the other side by the appeal to that which had been "always, everywhere and by all" believed. This latter appeal was of course not an answer to the claim of Gnosticism to be the true philosophy of religion, but it did succeed in making clear that Gnosticism was not the Christianity which was contained in the New Testament. Furthermore in refusing to answer philosophical objections to Christianity by

philosophical arguments and by concentrating attention upon its strictly theological elements, Catholicism accomplished two things: it preserved the theological elements which it had inherited; and it repudiated the modernist's position of theology as of necessity adapting itself to current modes of thought at the expense of its own criteria.

Viewed in the retrospect it would appear that theology, from the third century, was in danger of sharing the same fate which philosophy had brought upon mythology. That such is not the case is not only due to the refusal already noted on the part of the Christian apologists to debate the fundamental schema of Christianity, but it was also due to the fact that when philosophy entered into Christianity it came as a defender rather than as an opponent. Justin, it is true, emphasized the philosophy of the revealed Logos, but the great theologians who followed him never swerved in their loyalty to the "principles," as Origen would call them, of the rule of faith. They saw in philosophy the means of making more tenable those theological positions which were inherited from Scripture rather than from philosophy. Their example has been followed by the theologians since their day and in consequence, no matter how dependent orthodoxy may have been upon philosophy in its intellectual appeal and in its method of developing individual doctrines, it has never allowed philosophy to replace the creeds. It has been inevitable, therefore, that in the same proportion as a philosophy has become identified with the strictly theological elements of a church system, the two should have been carried along together. A striking illustration of that is Thomas Aquinas, whose christianized Aristotelianism thoroughly identified philosophical method and point of view with theological positions. The current struggle of the Roman Curia with modernism is an illustration of how a theology which has grown rigid through the dogmatizing of philosophical concepts fails to respond to the new presuppositions which condition the evolution of social experience and philosophy itself. But similar illustrations could be drawn from Lutheranism and Calvinism. Each of these great systems has suffered a hardening of the arteries of theology because of the introduction into it of philosophical concepts transformed

into orthodoxy by ecclesiastical and political authority. In consequence neither system responds readily to the modern mind.

2. Thus we are brought to the second reason for the failure of theology to develop *pari passu* with social evolution. The philosophizing of theology might have been to a considerable extent rectified in the course of the development of Christianity had it not been rendered static by being transformed into orthodoxy.

A student of church history does not need to be told how this process proceeded. Generally speaking, it may be said to have begun in an attempt at some adjustment of the inherited Christian faith to a philosophical mode of thinking; this was followed by a period of controversy in which the defenders of the inherited *regula fidei* were forced to justify their position by the use of some philosophical concept; thereupon there occurred the holding of a council which formulated the doctrine in dispute in accordance with *regula fidei* or creed and the philosophy of its defenders, and then made the acceptance of its formularies the test of right belief. As the decisions of these councils were as a rule enforced by the state as well as by the penalty of excommunication from the church, theology steadily grew less responsive to the changing social mind. There ensued the lamentable situation so widespread at the present time in which the union of essential elements of Christianity with their philosophical elaboration and defense is so complete that to re-define the one by the substitution of new thought-forms is regarded as heretical if not worse. Protestantism here suffers with Catholicism. Orthodoxy is defensible simply because it is orthodoxy, that is, something made authoritative by an appeal to the past. In the same proportion as this authoritative element remains in theology is it compelled to oppose not only genuinely anti-religious movements like materialism but other movements which involve the modification of the philosophical elements which have been integrated into orthodoxy by church authority.

We see here the fundamental weakness of a doctrine which depends solely or chiefly upon authority. It of necessity perpetuates philosophical and social survivals. However serviceable it may have been to the age in which it was formulated; however it may have functioned helpfully because of its participation in the

dynamic presuppositions of the life of its day, it grows incapable of service and helpfulness in ages of different character. Indeed, we might almost say, in the same proportion in which it did function well does its rigidity render it incapable of vital service to those communities which are dominated by different social minds. For this, if for no other reason, there is imminent danger lest the essential and permanent values which orthodoxy expresses shall be lost to those who no longer accept the philosophy and no longer share in the social experience which orthodoxy has embodied in itself.

3. Yet this cannot obscure the fact which the history of the doctrine-making process discloses. Orthodoxy is the outcome of a process, unhappily arrested by ecclesiasticism, by which fundamental religious realities were mediated to religious needs of a given period by the use of the presuppositions of that period's social experience. Any theological reconstruction therefore that would be thorough-going and do for our age what the original creators of theology did for theirs in preconiliar periods must face two tasks: first, it must distinguish between the theological schema which came over from the messianic Christianity of the primitive church and that philosophical construction which has built up by it as defense an explanation; and second, it must evaluate the schema itself in terms of religious efficiency. This second is the primary task of today. As long as it is neglected will theology be in distress. Christianity can never dominate our modern world by merely changing its philosophical element. That is of course demanded, but the fundamental need is that of dramatic analogies by which religious thinking can be identified with those dynamic presuppositions on which our entire social activity depends.

The position which the theologian will take in the present moment of unrest will be very largely determined by his conception of the aim of theology. If, as many hold, the purpose of theology is to give final and lasting formulations for religious experience and so to express religious truth that it shall be as statically absolute as metaphysical reality itself, there is no appeal except that of orthodoxy itself to the authority either of councils, the pope, or an a-priori belief in an infallible Scripture. It goes without saying

that such an appeal will completely break with our modern world. If, on the other hand, the purpose of theology is held to be functional and if it is an ever-growing approximation to ultimate reality through the satisfaction it gives to the ever developing and changing religious needs of different periods, then theological method becomes to a considerable extent empirical and pragmatic. Theological reconstruction will seek first of all not philosophical means of adapting a theological schema to our modern world but will rather seek to reproduce the actual procedure of theology in its creative epochs. That is to say, as theology in such epochs has utilized the dynamic presuppositions conditioning all social activity in general, will it today seek to utilize such presuppositions as are now creative.

Nor is this a difficult task. The theologian who approaches his problem from the point of view of social experience rather than that of metaphysics will recognize two presuppositions which are reconstructing our modern world: evolution and creative democracy. Just how these two presuppositions can be used for theological reconstruction must be left for further discussion.